

Argonne ranked in top 20 best places to be a postdoc by magazine

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Argonne was recently ranked 20th best place for postdocs to work by life sciences magazine, *The Scientist*. The annual article, run for the fifth time in 2008, surveys postdocs at hundreds of labs and institutions, private and government, for-profit and not-for-profit, to gauge their opinions on the institutions they work for. Argonne, which did not make the list last year, was the only Office of Science laboratory ranked in 2008.

"It is great to be number one among all the Office of Science labs," said Harold Myron, Director of the Division of Education Programs. "We can truly aspire to continued success for Argonne and its postdocs."

Postdoctoral Programs Coordinator Giselle Sandi said a key aspect of the success of Argonne's postdoctoral programs has been a commitment by the lab to create a rewarding and productive tenure for all of the approximately 150 postdocs currently working at the lab, including the creation of the Postdoctoral Office within the Division of Education Programs in November of 2006.

The office has two main focuses, Sandi said. The first is to oversee the lab's three main postdoctoral programs: the Named Postdoctoral Fellowship Program, Director's Postdoctoral Fellowships and Division Postdoctoral Appointments.

The Argonne Named Postdoctoral Fellowship Program awards fellows internationally on an annual basis to outstanding doctoral scientists and engineers who are at early points in promising careers. The fellowships are named after scientific and technical luminaries who have been associated with the laboratory, its predecessors and the University of Chicago since the 1940s.

Director's Postdoctoral Fellows are selected based on their research and academic accomplishments, as well as the strength of their research proposals. They are given the opportunity to collaborate with Argonne scientists and engineers on existing programs and on new initiatives. Director's Postdoctoral Fellows are selected three times per year.

Division Postdoctoral Appointments are hired on a continuous base and typically conduct research on existing Argonne science and technology programs. Candidates are selected based on their academic background and possible input to the research program as described in their proposals.

The Lab-Wide Postdoctoral Committee plays a vital role in the selection and recommendation of the postdoctoral fellows and associates. Their hard work and input is invaluable to the success of the program.

The second major focus of the Postdoctoral Office is the enhancement of the postdoc experience. "It is important that the time a postdoc spends at Argonne is not only academically rewarding, but also socially fulfilling," Sandi said. To that end, the office hosts monthly brown-bag seminars and pizza lunches, as well as an annual picnic and a wine-and-cheese

reception with Argonne Director Robert Rosner. The office is currently working to create a lab-wide postdoc mentoring program.

The brown-bag seminars offer an opportunity for postdocs to gain perspective on the research currently being conducted at the lab, which is crucial for establishing collaborations, Sandi said. In 2007, the seminars were given by associate lab directors and division directors. This year, they are given by postdocs themselves. This presents an opportunity for postdocs to share the research they are involved in with their peers and to practice communication skills. At pizza lunches, postdocs socialize and network as well as hear speakers on career-building subjects such as negotiation skills. The Division of Education Programs and Human Resources play a major support role in organizing these activities.

"We are very excited to have such active and committed group of postdocs at Argonne," Sandi said. Some other institutions have approximately a 10 percent participation rate in a given event, whereas Argonne's has been 30 percent or higher. "This reflects the level of enthusiasm of our postdocs."

The office also works in tandem with the Newcomer's Assistance Office, a group that offers help to employees new to the area, and often to the United States, with housing and other relocation services.

The Postdoctoral Office is currently working on a lab-wide mentoring program to further enhance the postdoc experience at Argonne. The office is working with some principal investigators to ensure that, in the future, every new postdoc who arrives at Argonne will be working with a mentor who can offer advice and expertise, as well as someone to talk with regarding both struggles and successes.